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DISCUSSION

PETER ROBERTS, PH.D., SECRETARY INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE, YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS, NEW YORK: The first thing that occurred to me in listening to the papers read this morning was, that we need some definitions in order to clarify ideas upon this important question. An industrial combination exists for commercial purposes. It is not a question whether it has a soul or not. The reason for its existence is commercial. The faith that is in it is summed up in profits. The individual members of an industrial combination may be humane and charitable, but the combination has its being and its continued existence because it is the most profitable method of carrying on business devised by capitalists. We also should define a worker or laborer in the sense this discussion considers him. Sixty per cent of the workers of the United States make less than \$600 a year and none of us who are here this morning can call himself a worker in that sense. The men who depend for their daily bread upon the daily rate of pay given to them in industrial concerns are the people we have in mind.

It has been said by the gentlemen on my left that industrial combinations advance wages, those on my right claim that wages have been reduced. Both are correct. Wages is a very complex question, but we can state without fear of contradiction that the high wage of industrial workers which prevailed twenty years ago has been reduced, while the lower wage of unskilled workers has been raised. I was told the other day of a man who made \$83 in one day in a steel mill and that year his annual income was \$8,000. Another man who worked in Jones and Laughlin's, South Side, Pittsburgh, made \$33 a day for nearly five years. It was not unusual twenty years ago to find men earning \$15 or \$20 a day in a certain industry. These high wages have been leveled down, they are not found to-day. A plant that paid \$22 for riveting a car has the work done to-day for \$8, hence men who could make formerly \$5 and \$6 a day can to-day barely make \$2.50 or \$3. On the other hand, twenty years ago I knew men working for 90 cents and \$1 a day. The lowest wage I have found in industrial plants at present is \$1.30, \$1.40, and in the United States Steel Corporation the average would possibly be

\$1.60 for ten hours' work. I am convinced that industrial combinations pay a higher wage than independent concerns. It has been said that the standard of living should govern wages. I do not think that is feasible. Another remedy is to establish a minimum wage of \$2 or \$2.50 a day. An experiment is now being carried on in Great Britain upon this very point and we can afford to wait and see developments.

Effects upon working conditions. Under industrial combination they have both been improved and made worse. I visited a steam plant lately where four boilers of 420 h. p. each were fed automatically. The coal came in cars, was dumped into the hole, raised by chained buckets to a crusher, then conveyed to the hoppers, then shaken down by mechanical device on the fire. The man who attended those boilers had nothing to do save to watch the gauge, watch the water, and see that the steam was abundant. The grate was also cleaned by an automatic appliance, but it was necessary for the man to take a bar occasionally and release the clinkers from the grate. He told the superintendent that he wanted a helper for this purpose. The employer said: "Why, a few years ago you worked without a shirt, shovelled the coal on the fire yourself, cleaned out the grate in the old way, and then took out the ashes, and now you cannot take a bar to release the clinkers." "Oh," said the man, "that was —. I am out of that now." I remember the puddlers who stood before the furnace kneading pig iron for twelve hours a day. If they could get out three tons of metal they were good for nothing else and in summer time many of them at the close of day lay down from sheer exhaustion. Last week I stood in front of an open-hearth furnace having in it seventy tons of metal. It was fed by machinery, the doors went up and down by machinery. All the man had to do was to watch the molten metal, see that the gas was properly regulated, test the component parts of the mixture, and his three helpers were not slaves. Occasionally they had strenuous work and hot work, but it was as nothing compared with the man who worked before the puddling furnace twenty or thirty years ago. On the other hand, conditions are worse because of speeding-up and necessary disagreeable conditions. Take riveting. When this was done by hand it was hard on the ears, but it was an art and each riveter took pride in his work as a skilled worker. Now we have the pneumatic hammers worked by air, but the man who handles this kind of a

hammer is under tension and a strain that is not conceivable under the old manual method of doing the work. You work a riveter with these modern machines for eight hours a day for five consecutive years and he will not be good for much else. Take the molders. Machine molding does not require a skilled worker and still I have seen men working on chilled car wheels at a tension that eight hours would exhaust every particle of their strength. We want to preserve every improved condition possible and we are glad that these are possible, but we also want to consider the man who works under such a pressure that after five or ten years he is a dependent. These conditions demand attention, and I think that the remedy is that all employment which puts such a strain on manhood and womanhood that the strongest cannot stand more than ten years of it, ought to be subject to a rotatory system or a reduction of hours, that men and women may attain the point of greatest efficiency consistent with the demands of physical capacity and a well-rounded citizenship.

The effect on labor organization. This has been destructive. Industrial combinations have uncompromisingly fought labor organizations. Take the following instance: In a town in western Pennsylvania two tin mills were operated by independent concerns and they were thoroughly organized. The combination got hold of the mills and very soon they were shut down and worked only three months out of twelve in the year. The town was reduced from a condition of prosperity to one of poverty. The town council came together, and appointed a committee to wait on the representative of the combination in that section of the country. The men were made clearly to understand that non-union mills worked full time. They transmitted this message to the labor organizations and within two weeks both charters were returned. Since then, for the last six years, these mills have worked regularly with only the ordinary intermission necessary for repairs.

The discussion this morning has turned solely upon effect of industrial combinations on labor employed by these combinations. There is another large group of workers outside. What is the effect upon these people who are employed by independent concerns? There is unrest and dissatisfaction in the group employed by the combinations, but there is still greater unrest and discontent among the ranks of workers employed by independent concerns. I will mention two things that cause unrest. First, these workers see

protection given to the employees of industrial combinations. The work done in the establishment of industrial insurance by the United States Steel Corporation is splendid. It has set the pace to other concerns, but it has set agoing a greater desire on the part of workers in general to secure for themselves the benefits which are now enjoyed by the employees of the United States Steel Corporation. The legislators of every state are hurrying to meet this demand and still greater efforts will be made in the next few years to meet the clamor of wage-earners for insurance against accident and pension for aged workers. Second, the vast mass of workers also feel that industrial combinations give unto the few at their head a great advantage to take more than their share of the national dividend. The workers believe that they do not get their right share of the productive wealth of the nation. They affirm that the men at the head of industrial combinations take the fat of the fry, while a bare subsistence is given the vast majority of laborers. If \$800 a year income gives the head of a family bare means of subsistence, we must remember that fifty-four per cent of the heads of families in the United States do not come within a hundred or one hundred and fifty dollars of that figure. This discontent is real. It does not seem possible that conditions can last long under present rates of distribution. There are ominous signs of discontent. These have cropped out both in a silent way by the ballot and also by industrial upheavals which have arrested the attention of the civilized world. We must take these things into consideration and the unrest and discontent among the working classes to-day must not be pooh-poohed or blindly passed by.

MR. JOHN A. FITCH: I did not come here to enter into a debate, but since Mr. Bolling did me the honor of mentioning some of the things that I said, I should like to add just a few words more. I want to say that I have no animosity in this matter at all, and I believe in large combinations. I believe that it is possible for working conditions to improve more rapidly under large combinations than they can in small individual plants. I tried to put before you a number of evidences of their having improved.

I believe that all of us here are concerned about the welfare of the people, that we believe that folks are more important than billets, that it is worth while to consider whether men, women and children are well off in this country, and that this is more important

even than to get the foreign market away from Germany. Not that anybody has suggested that this is not a great thing, but I want to have it clearly brought out. We can easily consider questions that seem to be questions of fundamental justice, and forget the man that is down in the ditch. We may, in our intelligence, gather here and decide things we think are good for the world, but what we decide may hurt instead of help, if we do not understand the point of view of the man who works with his hands.

Mr. Bolling says that a great many union men are working in the Steel Corporation plant, and that they are satisfied. I question Mr. Bolling's right to speak for laboring men and to say just how they feel. I do not claim that I can speak for them. Yet my opportunity for observing them has been such, I think, as to make it fair for me also to express an opinion. For nearly a year in 1907 and 1908 I lived in Pittsburgh and talked with steel workers whenever I could. In September, 1910, I started on a trip to the steel centers of the United States, visiting Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Johnstown, Steelton, Bethlehem, Pa., Youngstown, Ohio, Chicago, Gary, Pueblo and Birmingham, taking ten months for the trip. I talked with laboring men in all of these places and tried to get their point of view. The things I have been saying have been based on that investigation. I found everywhere a great feeling of unrest, a feeling of bitterness, among the employees of the Steel Corporation as well as of other companies.

The Steel Corporation people believe, I think, that they are doing great things for labor. I believe they are mistaken. How can they be cognizant that they are doing the right thing when there is no opportunity for labor as a whole to express itself and to let the managers know what they want? I had a very pleasant interview with Judge Gary once and I told him some of the things that I have been mentioning to you. He expressed a wish that dissatisfied men could get in touch with him personally. At the Edgar Thomson plant some employees had gone to the superintendent with a petition, asking for an eight-hour day with an equivalent decrease in wages, and they had never received even a reply. Another group at the National Tube Company plant in McKeesport had begun to draw up a similar petition when they received word from the superintendent that they had better drop it. I told Judge Gary of these things and he said that that was not right.

Now there was a superintendent in a Pittsburgh mill, a highly paid man, getting a salary of at least three thousand dollars a year. I knew that he was opposed to seven-day labor. So an associate of mine, in view of Judge Gary's statement, wrote and asked if he would not circulate a petition among his men asking for one day of rest in seven. His reply was that he had been in the corporation for a long time and that when he quit he wanted to quit of his own accord, he did not want to be fired, and so he thought it best not to circulate the petition. Since then, I have talked with Steel Corporation employees all over the United States and asked them if they would be willing to sign a petition like that. The invariable reply was that they could not go over the heads of their superiors—they would be fired.

So here we have a situation where the men at the top want to do the right thing, but the organization is such that they cannot know the needs of the workmen—there is no means of communication. I am not talking here about employers who are putting men on the rack, who are lying awake nights thinking of ways of doing harm to their employees. Not at all. I am speaking of men who have humanitarian motives, but who are following what I feel sure is a mistaken policy, and who, because of this policy that prevents any discussion by the workmen of matters pertaining to their well-being, are prevented from dealing justly, and are continuing in force policies that are inimical to the welfare of the men.

I want to say just a word in regard to the statistics that I quoted, tending to show that the unskilled workers do not get enough money to enable them to live according to American standards. I quoted a study made by Professor Chapin and others in New York. I have not heard of statisticians expressing any opinion that that was not a scientific study. In fact, I think it is pretty generally conceded that Professor Chapin's figures are accurate. So, having the cost of living in New York, I took the figures of the English Board of Trade, from their study of the cost of living in America. Mr. Bolling himself suggested to me the other day that I do that. And I discovered that their figures showed the cost of living to be the same in Pittsburgh as in New York. So I believe that it was fair to use the figures the way that I did. The unskilled steel workers are not starving to death, and they are able to live, although in very wretched condition. But they are very largely single men, or men

who have left their families in Europe, because they cannot afford to support families on the wages that they receive. Conditions must be such in America that men can have families, and if our industries are to be manned by immigrants, wages must be such as to enable them to set up independent homes.

As to Mr. Bolling's suggestion that the way of escape for unskilled laborers is through their acquiring skill and moving up into the ranks of the better paid positions, I want to point out a few things that he has apparently overlooked. In the decade 1881 to 1890, the average annual immigration into this country was 524,661. Seventy-two per cent of these immigrants were from Northern and Western Europe and only eighteen per cent were from Southern and Eastern Europe. In the decade ending with 1910, however, the average annual immigration was 879,538, and of these only about twenty-two per cent were from Northern and Western Europe, while more than seventy-two per cent were from Southern and Eastern Europe. In the year 1907 alone, 1,285,349 immigrants came into this country and seventy per cent of them were from the three countries Austria-Hungary, Italy and Russia. I am quoting these figures from "The Immigration Problem," by Jenks and Lauck.

This is of great significance, in view of the fact that the immigrants from Northern and Western Europe are to a considerable extent skilled mechanics fitted to take the higher positions. A strong example of this occurred in the year 1897, when under a beneficent tariff the tin plate industry was born. There were no men in this country skilled in the manufacture of tin-plate, so we had to import skilled labor from Europe. I do not mean to imply that there was a violation of the contract labor law; but coincident with the building of tin mills, there was a great immigration of Welsh tin men. Now, when nearly three-fourths of the immigration is from Southern Europe, the unskilled labor market is being swamped. We are getting immigrants who know something about farming, and nothing about industrial occupations. In addition to this important fact the situation is further complicated, because in the steel industry especially the tendency is for the proportion of skilled men to become less and less. If all of this great mass of unskilled labor were capable of rising to the skilled positions, it would be a mathematical impossibility for any but a few of them to do so, on account of the relatively small proportion of such positions. The only way by which

it could possibly be done would be to kill off the skilled men as rapidly as possible and to eliminate at least half of the unskilled at regular intervals.

Just one word more in regard to what modern industry has done. Because of large combinations of capital, it is possible for labor conditions to be improved, but this is a possibility that has not been fully realized. Coincident with the development of great combinations of capital has come increased sub-division of labor. In earlier times, the man who started a process generally finished it. He had a chance to give vent to the creative or artistic instinct which he might have, but that is no longer true. Work has become specialized and no longer is there the opportunity that there formerly was for a man to put his personality into his work. He does one small part of the process of which he sees neither the beginning nor the end. So the tendency is under modern conditions of industry to make a man into a machine instead of a thinking being. It is just this condition that makes it essential that the working day be short, if we are going to develop and conserve the artistic spirit that exists among the workmen. The short day demand is not the demand of the lazy man who wants to do less work. An employer of labor said to me protestingly: "What right have you to stop a man at the end of eight hours when possibly he may be just getting interested in his work and want to see a process through? A man conducting experiments in a laboratory, for example, often starves himself and works feverishly for hours in the hope of bringing something to fruition, or of finding a new path, but you want to deprive the workman of this right to an eager interest in his work. You want to stop him just because the clock has got to a certain point." It is exactly because I want to accomplish that thing and want to conserve the workman's interest in his work that I favor a shorter work-day, so that he shall not have his spirit deadened by the mechanical efforts that he puts forth in his daily toil. He must have an opportunity to develop the spiritual and the artistic side of his nature, or modern industry is going to make him a poorer citizen instead of a better one.

MR. SAMUEL GOMPERS, PRESIDENT AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR: I am very sorry that the false impression has gone forth that I work thirty-six hours a day. I have heard the gentlemen who addressed you, have been very much interested in what has been said,

and I will attempt to discuss in ten minutes some of the points with regard to which I shall be very glad to announce my entire assent and call attention to some of the statements from which I must express dissent. Notwithstanding any facility I may have to adapt and concentrate myself, I am sure that in ten minutes I shall do myself and you a grave injustice. I am very much interested in the statements that have been made. To jump and skip on the high places: I have had great pleasure in being acquainted for many years with Mr. McCleary who addressed us this morning as the typical "worker," and who is secretary of the American Iron and Steel Institute and located at New York. Of course the facility with which he can address an audience on the basis of being a "workman" must commend itself to your very serious consideration, particularly when we have the working men, the working women, and the working children of our country in mind. I know that Mr. McCleary has worked hard and long and assiduously, but I think that he has another basis from which to present this question than from the standpoint of the American workman, workwoman or working child, as I understand we are trying to discuss this question this morning.

I have met Professor McCleary, not only in his home state, Minnesota, but I have met him as a member of congress, a member of the committee on labor, and I am very sorry to say that I have spent my hours in vain before that committee, in the presence of Professor McCleary, if I have conveyed to him that conception of the philosophy of the shorter working day that he has expressed this morning. If my memory serves me right, he seems to entertain an idea, which he obtained before the committee on labor in the house, that there exists in the minds of the advocates of the shorter workday a notion that there is a fixed amount of work to do, and that if the shorter workday should be introduced there would be more work for all others to do. I say, if that is his conception, I have spent many idle and wasteful hours in explaining otherwise. For in every utterance that I have made on this subject, and those who have been associated with me have made, it has been the very proposition that a reduction of the hours of labor would, by reason of man's additional leisure and opportunities, for him and his family, and for this whole people, have as a consequence a larger vista of life, and a greater production of things, and a constant increase in demands, in which and for which it would be necessary to introduce more and better, and still better, machin-

ery and methods of production, giving more employment to the workers of our country. I should write myself down a dunce if I, or the men and women with whom I have associated, should advocate a proposition based upon the conception that there is only a certain amount of work to do. Why, the fact that there is a constantly increasing production of the wealth of the country would make such a position untenable. We want a shorter workday in order that a man may go to his home and to his little ones and spend there the time that shall help to make out the life of a full-rounded American citizen, and that he may have the opportunity of acquainting himself with the conditions of society, with his civic and political duties, and be in a better position to exercise these duties.

I take it that production is for utility, for use, and, as has been stated before, production is to-day on a large scale instead of upon a small scale. The conditions of the working people, I grant you, in many instances have improved. But there are two things that have been the result of combination, which did not exist prior to the formation of these industrial combinations. The time was when men worked from sun-up to sun-down. With the introduction of machinery and artificial light, workshops were operated after nature's light went down. In no time in the history of civilized nations, within the past hundred or more years, until the era of industrial combinations, were there so many long hours of labor each day. Secondly, never were there seven days in each week. The seven days' labor was the result of our industrial combinations.

I am not a man who finds himself in antagonism to the industrial combinations as such. I have believed that honest industry should not be hampered by meddling legislatures, but I also hold that the right of free association is essential to the wage-earners if an equilibrium is to be established between employers and employed. The tremendous power that industrial combinations hold over the workers when these are acting as individuals must be checked by the workers acting in unison. I grant that some of the labor conditions have improved since the era of industrial combinations, but I take issue with the gentleman who is solicitor for the United States Steel Corporation when he assumed the magnanimous position implied when he speaks of "what we have done for labor." What "we" have done for labor! I would prefer that all improvement should come through the manhood and character of the workers themselves. I

think a man improved who is unwilling to accept the charity that is offered to him; it is not a good substitute for bread honestly earned by the sweat of one's brow. The industrial combinations, it is true, have done some things, not voluntarily—very few of them have—they have either been forced to do it by the state or from fear of the industrial revolt. Some of the improved conditions which have been conceded by or forced from industrial combinations are more than offset by the destruction of the character and independence of the American spirit of the people in their employment. To-day the United States Steel Corporation is practically free from any "inconvenience" from the organized labor movement. It has peace in its plant. It is the sort of peace that the Czar of Russia proclaimed when he said, "Peace reigns in Warsaw." The United States Steel Corporation, and all of the other corporations which have either by direction or indirection in the same or lesser degree succeeded in crushing out labor organization, are lulling themselves into a fancied security, but one morning or other they will wake up and find it was either a dream or a nightmare. They have crushed out the organizations of labor in many plants. They have, by direct or indirect methods, opened up a channel of immigration to their plants, and American workers are there no longer to any appreciable extent. The managers think, in a way they know, that their immigrant employees are docile! They do their bosses' bidding without murmur, they go along patiently, carrying their burdens, and the heads of the combinations feel safe. So did the proprietors of the textile mills of Lawrence. The effect of all schemes put in operation by these corporations has been to degrade their workmen, to tie them to their work, to take away from them the opportunity of protest. But some day they will protest. Probably not in the same way as the American trade unions, the way of the American Federation of Labor, not by the good old-fashioned American plan, the Anglo-Saxon plan. But if the great industrial combinations do not deal with us they will have somebody else to deal with who will not have the American idea.

Just a word as to a remark made about what should be done, as a way out of existing conditions, that the unskilled workers should rise out of the ranks of the unskilled and move toward the ranks of the skilled. That is splendid, in theory, but in practice it is not a question of a man walking from one street to another by choice, or

walking from the slums into the parade grounds or to the parks. The unskilled workmen are not there by choice. They would prefer to be skilled workmen, and be able to join the skilled workmen in their ranks and be part of them. The fact of the matter is that with the wonderful machinery that is continually coming in, with the consequent division, subdivision and specialization of labor, there are less and less numbers of skilled workmen, proportionately, in each plant. The ranks of the unskilled workmen are constantly recruited from the ranks of the skilled workmen, who find their occupation gone by reason of new tools, methods, inventions.

I will close by saying that the American labor movement does not stand for lawlessness, for violence. We realize that none are injured more by lawlessness and violence than those upholding the cause of the men and women of labor. If perchance there be a wage-worker here and there who becomes a derelict and who resorts to violence, should all our movement and all our men be compelled to bear the odium? Is that test applied to every other profession and institution in our country? And I want to say this also, with regard to the remark concerning "these self-chosen leaders of labor." There are none of them self-chosen. They are the selection of the rank and file, by the most democratic methods. Their unselfish, self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of the working people, and their demonstrated worth, have earned them the respect of the toilers of our country. They are men who have tried their level best to do for their fellows. It is not pleasant, when discussing a concrete proposition, to have it hurled in the faces of the representatives of labor that they are self-appointed and self-seeking. Of course, I prefer the good will of my fellows to criticism, but there is still a greater preference that I have; I want to be satisfied that my conscience is clear, and that I have tried to serve my fellow-man.